

## RUMOR AND PUBLIC OPINION

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### ABSTRACT

Rumor is a collective effort to interpret a problematic and affectively evocative situation. A case study of rumor demonstrates that when a public is keenly interested, rumor tends to be elaborated and diversified, contrary to the expectations and assumptions of Allport and Postman, who generalize on the basis of laboratory experimentation.

### I

"Rumor," in general usage, refers to an unverified account or explanation of events, circulating from person to person and pertaining to an object, event, or issue of public concern. Whether, beginning with such a definition, rumors can be treated as a single and separate generic class is problematic. There are significant differences among rumors of various types: retrospective rumors focused upon the implications of past events, in contrast with prospective or predictive rumors anticipating the future; rumors planted and systematically transmitted to serve the ends of special groups, as compared with those which arise, apparently spontaneously, under conditions of social unrest; rumors which represent extreme flights of imaginative fantasy, as opposed to those which carry a rational, newslake quality. Because of this wide variation, attention must be given to the definition and classification of rumors and to their position in the field of collective behavior.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the objective analysis of rumor is contingent upon the systematic treatment of various public opinion processes.

Our present concern is with rumors which appear to arise spontaneously after a public has been formed through common interest in an issue or event.<sup>2</sup> Rumors of this type can

be considered the product of collective efforts to interpret a problematic situation, when the public views the situation affectively and when authoritative information is lacking.

"Public opinion," in contrast to more static concepts like "culture," designates temporary and fluctuating attitudes and beliefs resulting from collective efforts to interpret constantly emerging new situations. A group of people develops an interest in an event or issue, reciprocally communicates attitudes and beliefs pertaining to it, and interprets these in terms of the existing cultural context and their specialized frames of reference. This occurs within a social organization and is dependent upon the leadership, group affiliations, and channels of communication within the society.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the constant flow of new events and issues, institutionalized channels have developed in our society for the communication of new attitudes and beliefs. Communications of broad social significance are usually transmitted, at least in part, by mass media. Communications significant to a specific group or organization are common—defining fictitious issues may emerge. In this case the rumor itself serves as the event which produces a public.

<sup>1</sup> For a very thorough analysis of rumor as a collective process see Tamotsu Shibutani, "The Circulation of Rumors as a Form of Collective Behavior" (unpublished doctoral diss., University of Chicago, 1940).

<sup>2</sup> When there is general social unrest, rumors pertaining to a wide variety of issues or rumors

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the significant characteristics of public opinion and of the methodological implications see Herbert Blumer, "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling," *American Sociological Review*, XIII (1948), 542-54; Alfred McClung Lee, "Public Opinion in Relation to Culture," *Psychiatry*, VIII (1945), 49-61; and Carroll D. Clark, "The Concept of the Public," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, XIII (1933), 1-18.

ly transmitted in the form of official statements or are passed down, more informally, with the explicit understanding that there is some kind of authoritative sanction. Public opinion is always more than an automatic response to authoritative opinion. Even when no conflicting authoritative opinion is presented, issues are discussed informally and are related to the specialized attitudes and beliefs of particular groups.

Rumor "opinion" differs significantly from other forms of public opinion, in that it is not verified through customary channels. The common-sense assumption that rumor is abnormal or pathological reflects the fact that the persons involved are normally expected or accustomed to rely upon authority or upon a different kind of authority. A social setting conducive to rumor occurs when a public is interested and concerned about a past or anticipated event, when authoritative information and explanation are lacking, and when social controls relevant to the situation are external to most members of the public.<sup>4</sup>

Under these conditions there is greater recourse to informal discussion, in the course of which the interest of individuals tends to be intensified. The public may be extended to include persons who originally were neither interested in, nor informed about, the situation. As persons move from one discussion group to another, speculation tends to be passed as rumor; and rumor comes to be represented as fact, often supported by citing supposedly authoritative sources.

Typically, the rumor public is more emotional than other publics. At times it borders incipiently on crowd behavior. Rumor objects tend to be affectively evocative—fascinating, weird, bizarre. Recurrently, in American society at least, issues which involve arson, murder, and sex deviation serve as rumor topics. To the extent that a public reacts affectively to an issue, rational con-

trols are released, and speculation and imagination are evoked. Goldhamer has suggested that affect is more easily displaced on persons than on nonhuman objects.<sup>5</sup> Rumor seems more likely to occur when public interest focuses on a person, although groups tagged with affect-laden stereotypes seem to serve nearly as well.

In the early stages of the process, members of a rumor public vary greatly in attitudes toward the object, issue, or event, according to the intensity and the kind of interest, concern, or anxiety. This variation is probably greater than in most other publics. The communication of rumor tends to reduce the divergence in attitudes and to produce a common definition of the situation and a common feeling or mood. Rumor is one means by which a collectivity, albeit a temporary and unstable collectivity, emerges from an aggregate.

## II

The work of Allport and Postman represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to examine rumor objectively.<sup>6</sup> Taking methodological cues from psychological experiments on memory and recall, these investigators designed a series of carefully controlled experiments, using chains of six or seven selected subjects. A visual stimulus, in the form of a picture of a suggestive social scene, was presented to the first subject, who passed on his impressions of it to the second, who subsequently passed on his impressions of the first subject's report to the third, and so on. Conclusions about the nature of rumor were derived by comparing the "terminal report" with the initial stimulus.

Allport and Postman summarize their conclusions under the concepts *leveling*, *sharpening*, and *assimilation*. "Leveling" refers to the tendency of a rumor, as it travels, to "grow shorter, more concise, more easily

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Goldhamer, "Public Opinion and Personality," *American Journal of Sociology*, LV (1950), 346-54.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1947).

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of rumor see Leon Festinger *et al.*, "A Study of Rumor: Its Origin and Spread," *Human Relations*, I (1948), 464-86.

grasped and told. In successive versions fewer words are used and fewer details are mentioned."<sup>7</sup> "Sharpening" is defined as "the selective perception, retention, and reporting of a limited number of details from larger context."<sup>8</sup> And "assimilation" "has to do with the powerful attractive force exerted upon rumor by the intellectual and emotional context existing in the listener's mind."<sup>9</sup>

These concepts are not offered as suggestive hypotheses but as concrete and explicit generalizations. For instance, Allport and Postman state: "What is seen or heard *must* [*sic*] be simplified in accordance with the economizing process of memory."<sup>10</sup> "It is often assumed that rumors become embroidered in the talking or that they become enlarged like a rolling snowball. This is a misconception."<sup>11</sup> "Stereotyping is a result of undue simplification in the interest of economizing mental effort."<sup>12</sup>

The Allport-Postman approach is different from that which deals with rumor as a form of public opinion and with public opinion as a complex collective process. They assume that the social context in which rumors occur can be reduced to a single chain of subjects; that, by implication, the wide circulation of rumor is nothing more than the adding-together of such chains; and that rumor can be explained, at least in part, by reference to uniform and pervasive psychological mechanisms like "the economizing process of memory."

Moreover, and perhaps more important, Allport and Postman proceed on the assumption that rumor basically results from distortion in perception and in *unilateral* verbal communication. Thus in the course of their experiments they completely rule out changes in meaning and in motivation which occur in the give and take of informal discussion. They also overlook the possibility that the same individual, transmitting rumor to a succession of persons, may com-

municate a different version in each instance, not just because of faulty memory, but because of differences in his relationship with them.

It is superficially evident that persons who develop and transmit rumors are not passively reacting to a stimulus, as Allport and Postman imply, but are acting in a situation that is problematic and affectively evocative to them. Public expectations, fears, anxieties, hostilities, and aspirations are often clearly manifest in rumors. Their development and transmission involve interpretation, discussion, speculation, and creative imagination.

Similarly, simple observation discloses that communication is a complicated time-space network, relating persons who are receiving, discussing, interpreting, forgetting, and transmitting attitudes and beliefs in a variety of social situations. The rapidity and complex nature of the process make rumor a difficult subject for objective examination. It is very unlikely that the methodological problems can be solved by applying the orthodox procedures of simplification and control employed in experimental psychology. Methodological contingencies lift the object of investigation out of its context so completely that the findings no longer pertain to rumor but to simple perception, memory, and recall. Because Allport and Postman designed their experimental situation like a classroom, their conclusions—leveling, sharpening, and assimilation—are similar to those of educational psychologists about retention in formal education.

Since Allport and Postman summarize their conclusions rather precisely under the concepts of leveling, sharpening, and assimilation, it becomes possible specifically to test these concepts, to determine whether conclusions derived from their approach are meaningful and explanatory when applied to empirical cases—to "natural" rather than to experimental situations. A set of rumors investigated by the writers is presented here as an empirical test of the Allport-Postman approach and as a general case study of rumor.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

## III

Rumors were circulated in a small mid-western city during a period of public concern about an unsolved crime—the rape and murder of a fifteen-year-old girl. The rumors, or set of rumors, had many variations, but a common theme: that the householder who had employed the victim as a baby sitter for the evening had returned home without his wife and murdered the girl. Although there was no authoritative verification at the time or subsequently, the rumors circulated throughout the community, resulting in considerable excitement. Two weeks intervened between the occurrence of the crime and the circulation of these rumors. During the first two days, press and radio devoted themselves to reporting all possible details of the murder and to reviewing similar incidents in the preceding few years in the same residential neighborhood.

Later, a number of events served to stimulate interest in the case and speculation about the identity of the murderer. The police appealed, through press and radio, for any type of information that might be relevant. Citizens were requested to report to the police any male who had scratches or cuts on his face or hands. A campaign was conducted to raise a reward for information leading to the apprehension of the murderer. The National Guard was called out to screen the area for possible clues. In a neighborhood near the place of the murder the police chased and exchanged shots with a prowler, but failed to apprehend him. Police cars constantly patrolled all streets in the vicinity.

Various activities expressed the special concern of particular groups and, being noted by others, served to intensify general public interest. Large numbers of residents drove past the scene of the crime. Others devoted themselves to gathering information about the family of the girl and the family which had employed her as a baby sitter. Measures were taken to safeguard homes against intruders. Girls and young women were warned against being alone

after dark. The rape-murder case became a common topic of conversation wherever persons gathered and associated.

Almost immediately after the crime, rumors began to circulate about the identity of the murderer. These rumors (or speculations) were widely varied, scattered, and of short duration. It was suggested or speculated that the murderer was a Negro; a high-school student; a cab driver, and a feeble-minded boy.

There were also rumors about the inefficiency and corruptness of the police. The issue of police competence persisted as a general topic of public discussion during and after the period when the baby sitter's employer was rumored to be the murderer. The latter, whom we shall refer to as "Mr. X," was alleged to have left a party which he and his wife were attending, returned to their home, entered the house, raped and murdered the girl, and subsequently returned to the party after changing his clothes. In general, this was the common element in the rumors which circulated for three or four days.

The numerous variations which developed from this central theme indicate interpretation, speculation, and creative imagination on the part of members of the public in the direction of co-ordinating the story with previous conceptions of the murder, of attributing stereotyped sex-criminal characteristics to Mr. X, of constructing a basis for sympathizing with his wife, of supplying authentic verification, and of generally molding a sensational account.

The writers, both residents of the community, observed as carefully as possible the communication of this particular set of rumors and assembled all possible information on the preceding events. About one hundred university students, residing in various parts of the community, were asked to set down in writing any rumor or any information heard during the previous week concerning the rape-murder case.<sup>13</sup> The assortment of

<sup>13</sup> This does not, of course, represent a sampling of rumors that were current at that time; not all

rumors collected by this procedure presents a configuration having a basic theme but a wide variety of detailed interpretations, some of which are contradictory in ideational content.

#### MR. X'S ABSENCE FROM THE PARTY

"Mr. X left the party for two hours, from 9:30 to 11:30."

Various reported as  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours, from 11:00 to 12:30, and from 11:00 to 12:00.

"When Mr. X returned to the party he had completely changed clothes, had scratches on his face."

Various reported as scratches on his back and on his chest.

"It is said that X left the party for about two hours. He said he was going out for more liquor, but instead returned home and completely surprised the young girl."

Also reported that he said he had been filling out an income tax form during his absence.

"When Mr. X came back to the party, he had blood and mud on his shoes."

"Mr. X had left the party, taken a bus, done the killing, and returned to the party."

#### THE DETECTION AND ARREST OF MR. X

"Mr. X was picked up and questioned all day."

"Mr. X is being held in Jackson City" (30 miles distant).

"Blood hounds followed the trail three times to where Mr. X was playing cards, but because of political reasons no arrests were made on this clue."

"Mr. X has confessed to the crime in Jackson City."

"When questioned by the police, X gave several stories as to where he was during his absence."

"X has been held in the local jail for questioning. He has been there two days. He can't account for the two hours he was absent from the party."

"X has signed a confession. He moved immediately to California and then his conscience got the better of him and he sent the signed confession to the local police."

"The police and the FBI have been trailing him since the day of the funeral."

rumors that were circulating in the community are necessarily represented. Virtual duplicates of those given here are not included.

"I've heard that he is now being held for questioning and that the police are trying to beat it [confession] out of him."

"Mr. X is in the penitentiary."

"The police picked him up last night and rushed him off to Jackson City. They are afraid to keep him here."

"Mr. X is being held in Jackson City for questioning and various tests, i.e., the lie detector."

"Mr. X is not being held; in fact, they believe he may be in California."

"Mr. X is hiding out with his family in Utah."

"X is being held for the murder; he was taken into custody in Minnesota."

"The police questioned him several times and he gave no satisfactory answer as to where he had been" [during his absence from the party].

#### EVIDENCE CONCERNING THE ATTACK

"He . . . entered the front door; that's why the porch light was on, because Miss B had recognized him and let him enter. He put the sawhorse by the window and broke the window to make it look as if the murderer had entered that way."

"In the house there were no fingerprints except those of the X family."

"The cord that was around Miss B's neck had been in a very dark part of a closet and wouldn't have been found if he [the attacker] hadn't already known where it was. Later I heard the window had been broken from the inside."

"Mud tracks led into the living room showing the front door had been used."

"The latch on the window he was supposed to have entered was broken from the inside."

"He went into the front door of his home, then staged the window scene."

"There were no scratches on the piano in front of the window, so he came in the front door."

"When he and his wife arrived home that evening, he would not let his wife go into the house but insisted on going in himself and then came out and told what he had seen."

"The window was too small for a man to crawl through."

"When his little boy was asked if he had been scared that night, he had said, 'No, my daddy was here.'"

"When the X child was questioned as to what he saw or heard the night of the murder,

he said, 'I saw a man who looked like daddy.' "

"The police have found the blood-soaked clothes he wore when he killed her."

"The clothes he had been wearing were found in the basement."

"The clothes he had been wearing were found in the car."

"He has blonde hair like that found at the scene of the crime."

"He undressed in the bathroom, so his wife could not see the scratches on his body."

"He entered the front door, and the window was smashed in the struggle. His footprints match those found."

#### EVIDENCE SUPPLIED BY INDIVIDUALS

"The information about the absence of Mr. X was supplied by a couple who were at the party on the night of the murder."

"Mr. X, who hired the babysitter, was turned in by his wife because he left the party one and one half hours at the time the murder was committed."

"Mr. X was turned in by his wife. She missed him for an hour at the time of the crime. She found some blood-soaked clothes of his in the basement."

"Mrs. X furnished the lead which led to his arrest; she has declared her intention 'never to live with him again' as a result of previous marital disagreements."

"Mrs. X spied on him while he was undressing in the bathroom and observed scratches upon his body. This she reported to the police."

"His wife has left him; she knew the truth all along."

"Either his wife or his father-in-law has reported him."

"His mother turned him in to the police, saying that he was an habitual sexual pervert, and that he had 'finally gone too far.' "

"Some one at the party sent a letter to the police reporting Mr. X's absence."

#### REACTIONS OF MRS. X

"His wife is covering up for him, but has gone to California to have her second child."

"The day of the funeral he took his wife to her home in Minnesota. From there she called her priest in Canton and asked him to help her. It is doubtful whether Mrs. X or the priest turned in X to the police. As a result of the shock of finding the murdered girl, Mrs. X lost a child."

"Mr. X had his wife leave town until it all blows over."

"Mrs. X has gone to her home in North Dakota."

Also reported as Wisconsin, Texas, and Illinois.

"His wife is having a nervous breakdown."

"Mrs. X is four months pregnant and has lost her child."<sup>14</sup>

"Mrs. X has gone insane."

"Mrs. X is in California, where she had a baby which was born dead, due to the effects of this case on her physiological well-being."

"His wife and child went to her mother's home in Wisconsin. It supposedly caused her to have a miscarriage."

"It was said that Mrs. X was pregnant, and that she lost consciousness when her husband was arrested. She is reported to be in a hospital, having been in a coma for ten days or so."

#### IMAGES OF MR. X

"I have heard that he was a known sex pervert from youth."

"He is an exceptionally intelligent man, a C.P.A., and talented in music."

"Miss K, aunt of the slain girl, went to school with Mr. X and she said that he was a queer-acting fellow."

"His wife reported that he had become 'woman crazy' during the past six months."

"Mr. X had at one time been in an insane asylum."

"Mr. X and his wife had not been getting along lately."

"Mr. X was said to be a no-good drunkard and carouser about town."

"Mr. X had been shell-shocked during the war, and insanity spells were not uncommon for him."

"The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. X has been 'on the rocks' for a year. She has filed suit now."

"Mr. X has been under suspicion for the Ferguson case five years ago."

"They [Mr. and Mrs. X] are sexually incompatible."

"There is a connection between him and the Ferguson murder a few years ago."

"He often left parties and returned later, so no one thought his behavior strange."

"He was drunk and unable to account for himself for these hours."

<sup>14</sup> The information that Mrs. X was pregnant was correct. However, she was duly delivered several months later.

## IV

It is probable that the central theme—that Mr. X had raped and murdered the girl during his absence from a party—developed in the course of speculations about the identity of the attacker. Since this theme appeared first, it is almost certain that the rumor did not emerge in full form. Among the elaborations, versions which tended to co-ordinate the story with previous conceptions of the murder seem to have followed the central theme almost immediately.

It was not, however, a simple case of one wave of elaboration spreading throughout the community, to be followed by another wave. Many persons did not hear the original version until it had been elaborated considerably. There is no reason to believe that each specialized version originated independently and ran its course in isolation from the others.<sup>15</sup> There must have been additions to the rumor as it was passed from person to person, discussed in a variety of social situations, and interpreted by individuals with special interests or preconceptions.

Whether this rumor “snowballed” in the process of transmission depends upon the perspective used in interpretation. “Snowballing” suggests increasing enlargement and implies that details are retained as new ideas are superimposed. Viewing the entire phenomenon as a *Gestalt* of interrelated rumors, probably derived from a common origin and differentiated into a profusion of details, the phenomenon does appear to have grown like a snowball. Certainly, there was an accumulation of details; whether any were completely lost in the course of transmission and elaboration is not known.

If one views each of the particular rumors as having an independent origin and a sepa-

rate “career,” then the case for leveling as opposed to snowballing can be supported very effectively, largely because it is logically impossible for an independent, particularistic rumor to snowball. In our opinion, such a frame of reference limits the possibility of securing information that would shed light on the nature of rumor—if rumor is fundamentally an aspect of public opinion and if communication in a public follows multilateral associational channels.

Apparently, something similar to what Allport and Postman call “assimilation” does occur. The stereotyping of Mr. X as the type of man who would commit such a crime; the portrayal of Mrs. X as reacting as a woman faced with such a situation might be expected to react; the alleged behavior of the police in apprehending and questioning Mr. X—all might be considered expressions of cultural preconceptions assimilated into the central theme, making the entire configuration more impressive and sensational but not necessarily more “coherent, plausible, and well-rounded.”<sup>16</sup>

Assimilation is not simply “the powerful attractive force exerted upon rumor by the intellectual and emotional context in the listener’s mind.”<sup>17</sup> The listener-interpretor-communicator is motivated in a social situation. From the latent residue of attitudes and beliefs in his memory, he consciously or unconsciously selects those which are appropriate in the situation as he defines it.<sup>18</sup> The variety of such situations which occur in a public almost necessitates changes in meaning and emphasis.

The setting in which the rumors used in this report occurred was very different from

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>15</sup> It also seems improbable that the central theme could have originated with the perceptual experience of an event, because of the time lapse between the murder and the rumors. Allport and Postman’s position is that “most rumors start as a report of an actual episode—that is to say, with someone’s perceptual experience of an event . . .” (*op. cit.*, p. 116).

<sup>18</sup> “An opinion, in the instance of a person, is the product of: the specific ‘point’ eliciting the opinion; the person’s cultural background, as it relates to the ‘point’ and as it is weighted by the current situation, including especially vivid recent incidents bearing upon the ‘point’; and his individual experiences, to the extent that they differ from the usual experiences of his group and society” (Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 315).

an artificially constructed experimental situation. The rape and murder were real, not fictitious, events. The public was composed of girls and women concerned about their personal safety; of sympathetic friends, relatives, and neighbors; of young men who had searched for clues with the National Guard; and of a great mass of persons who took a vicarious interest in the whole range of activities.<sup>19</sup> Where a public is composed of people with a variety of interests—and nearly every public is—any event or situation is likely to be diversely defined and interpreted.

There is no evidence in the present study of a general "economizing process of memory." It seems more likely that persons with very little interest forget details, while those who are keenly interested remember details, at least details which they consider crucial.

Allport and Postman generalize that proper names and titles tend to be omitted in the transmission of rumor. "In virtually all our experiments names of places and persons either dropped out or were distorted beyond recognition."<sup>20</sup> There is no evidence of wholesale omissions of proper names and titles in the rumors examined for this report. In fact, nearly all respondents stated specifically the names of the alleged attacker and the victim, and in a great many cases mentioned the place where Mr. and Mrs. X were spending the evening.

There may be a tendency to omit names and titles in certain types of rumors in which the basic content is not affected; in others, the effectiveness of the rumor seems to depend on their retention. If persons are intensely interested and emotionally aroused, they recall certain items with clarity and accuracy; they may even take items from other experiences and, with varying degrees

of accuracy, apply them to the one at hand. There was, for instance, a tendency among some persons to incorporate into the rumor information taken from the original press and radio version of the murder.

A portion of the distortion may be explained by the fact that a person, in the role of transmitter, is likely to have more personal interest in a rumor than he had in the role of receiver. Inside information bearing on an issue of public concern places a person temporarily in a position of prestige; and the prestige-position of the transmitter is more secure if the story can be made to sound authentic. The transmitter is sufficiently motivated to forget details that make the story dubious, to emphasize details that make it plausible, and to introduce new corroborating details.

The major limitation in the experimental study of rumor and of other forms of collective behavior lies in the failure to produce, or even to simulate, affectively toned motivational states comparable to those which occur in real life. This is true both of the small discussion group and of the public.<sup>21</sup>

The study of rumor in uncontrolled situations manifestly presents serious methodological difficulties. Rumor appears as an ephemeral, elusive phenomenon which cannot be fruitfully approached in historical perspective. To wait until interest has waned is to lose a large part of the basic information and to run the risk of ex post facto rationalization.

The essential characteristics of rumor are such as to require, at this stage at least, careful on-the-spot observation, preferably by a team of investigators. Although the ideational content of rumor is the easiest information to obtain and is superficially the most objective, it is not necessarily the most sociologically relevant. In the systematic investigation of rumor, attention should be given to such problems as the composition

<sup>19</sup> The police department's call to citizens to report any male with scratches or cuts on his face or hands made all men and older boys potential suspects and tended to intensify anxiety, especially after reports were circulated that innocent persons had been arrested and subjected to questioning.

<sup>20</sup> Allport and Postman, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Allport and Postman are ambiguous on this issue. They say that "indoor" rumors "may not be as lively or as emotionally toned, but they are cut from the same psychological cloth" (*ibid.*, p. 65).



of the public, the establishment of cultural beliefs and attitudes through rumor communication,<sup>22</sup> role behavior in groups where rumor is discussed, and personality characteristics of persons who specialize in rumor transmission.

It is particularly important that the emergence and communication of rumor be

<sup>22</sup> Of more than academic importance is the problem as to whether beliefs and attitudes established during a period of keen interest are effectively displaced by refutation, which is ordinarily accompanied by declining interest.

treated as a process. Consideration should be given to the question of whether there is a typical rumor cycle involving, perhaps, the formation of a public through common interest in an issue or event; relatively unfocused discussion gradually defining objects of interest; growing concern and increased discussion; the emergence of rumor; the growth of a rumor public and the proliferation of rumor; the dissolution of the rumor public; and the reorganization of public attitudes and beliefs.

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